



## LESSON 16: Play Writing for Readers' Theatre

**LESSON DESCRIPTION:** Students will work in teams of 3 to 5 to write short plays about helping a younger boy or girl spend less time watching TV. These plays can be performed within the class or as part of an activity for elementary children. They can also be videotaped.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS:** How can information be conveyed using playwriting? How do you write a play and how do you write dialogue? What is a method for beginning a play?

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will:

- write a play based on information they have learned and develop focused ideas in writing the play.
- exhibit personal style, voice and design to enhance the informational content.

### Core State Standards

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**W.8.3b.** Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

**W.8.3e** Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.

**LENGTH OF LESSON:** Two lessons lasting 50 minutes. It actually goes very quickly. Performing the play before an audience will add to the length of the lessons.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Writing notepad, one per student with name at the top
- Chalkboard or chart paper for the teacher to write down their ideas.
- Story Map graphic organizer, one per team of three to five students.

### VOCABULARY:

dialogue  
script  
collaborative

## PROCEDURE:

### Activity 16.1: Brainstorm ideas related to set, characters and dialogue.

1. **Tell students:** Today you're going to write a play about what you have learned about media use. We'll do this first as a group and our play will be about helping a younger boy or girl spend less time watching TV. You will first write a scene, which is like a chapter in a book, using a collaborative writing process. Gerald Chapman, who developed this technique, said that writing a play is like driving a car at night. The headlights show what is just in front and to the side of the car but you can't see very far ahead. This play will develop as we go and we can't always see very far ahead but that's OK.
2. This begins as a whole class activity with students brainstorming ideas. The teacher writes down their ideas and then the class makes their final selection by voting.
3. **Ask students:** *Where do you want your first scene to take place? This is called the setting.* Encourage students to be specific. If someone says a town, ask where in the town.

Teacher's Note: It's important to give students enough time to brainstorm ideas. Write down all ideas. These ideas will also be useful when they want to expand their play. Then have students vote and write the setting they selected.

1. **Ask students:** *Who do you want to be in this scene? These are the characters in the play. Brainstorm a name and description, e.g., Tom, a middle-age farmer.*

Have students brainstorm names for three characters. Suggest that one of the characters should be their age. Each student can vote three times. Keep the top three.

Teacher's Note: Students often want to begin writing a play with a lot of characters. However, the dialogue will be more interesting if they begin with only three. Tell students they can add more characters later.

5. **Tell students:** *We're going to begin writing what our character will say in our play which is called dialogue. Plays use **dialogue** to tell the story. This is the format used.*  
(write on the board)

Sue: Where are you going?

Mary: I'm looking for my brother.

**Tell the students:** *Write the character's name on the left followed by a colon and then write what the character says. Do not use quotation marks. Then skip a line and write the next character's name with a colon and so on.*

Have students brainstorm possible first lines and vote.

**Tell students:** *We're going to begin with the same line of dialogue. What should this line be and who should say the first line?*

Teacher's Note: It's especially important to give students enough time to brainstorm ideas for a first line. Often the first suggestions will be very short. However, once the students hear a good line it will stimulate higher quality dialogue. Write down all ideas. These sample lines will also be useful when all students begin writing dialogue. Then have students vote and select one for the first line of the play.

## Activity 16.2: Group writing as a whole class activity

1. Have students sit in a circle with a writing notepad. Their name should be on the top.  
**Tell students:** Write the first line that the class selected on the top of the page using the format we learned. Skip a line and pick another character and write a line of dialogue he or she might say.

Give the students sixty seconds to write their second line. Signal the end of the sixty seconds (ring a bell or raise your hand). Have the students hand their paper to the person sitting next to them in a clockwise rotation. If the students are sitting in a row they hand the notepad to the person behind them and the last person brings their notepad to the person at the front.

2. **Tell students:** Read what has been written and then add a new line of dialogue with a different character. You'll have sixty seconds again to write.

Continue for ten minutes having the students read and write a new line. At the end of the time each student will have an entire page of dialogue.

4. Have a teacher-led class discussion regarding the common problems found in students' observations. Have students record common problems found on their note cards and save in research folders for future use.
5. Ask students what they noticed from the video that they can relate to their own experiences with screens (i.e. video games and movies).

## Activity 16.3: Reading scripts

1. **Tell Students:** We now have over 9 or 10 different scripts. Read the one you have and raise your hand if you think it is a good script.
2. Have one of the student volunteers come up to the front or inside the circle and select two other students to help read the script. Have each student take one of the three characters and read their lines. Have several other scripts read aloud in front of the class.

**Teacher's Note:** It's very important to have students read these as a play in front of others. Students really enjoy this and are proud that they have written the start of a play.

## Activity 16.4: Students write their own individual script

1. **Tell Students:** Now you are going to write your own scene.. You should decide the setting and characters. However, limit your characters to no more than four. You may also use any of the ideas that the class brainstormed. You only have to write one scene. You don't have to write the entire play.
2. Give the students ten minutes to write their own scripts. If there is time left the students can read their scripts in front of the class.

## Activity 16.5: Student teams write mini-plays

Teacher's Note: You can let students brainstorm topics for their plays. However, the topics need to relate to research they have read and should be approved by the teacher. Or the teacher can provide a list of topics. One important topic is helping students learn to resist pressures to use media excessively especially violent media. We now have fathers that want to play the violent video games with their sons. Research has shown that helping teens learn to recognize and resist the persuasive tactics used in advertising they will be less likely to succumb to ads and peer pressure. (Learning How To Say 'No' To Alcohol Advertising And Peer Pressure Works For Inner-city Adolescents. ScienceDaily. *Addictive Behaviors* 33 (2008))

1. Have students work in groups of three to five. Give each team the Story Map graphic organizer. Have each team identify a problem related to children become addicted to TV and video games. They should write the problem in the center. Then have them identify a setting and three to five characters for their play based on the size of their group. They should come up with a solution to the problem and write this on their Story Map.
2. **Tell students:** Think of the events as the action in the play that will lead to a solution. Each event may also end up being a different scene with a different setting. Brainstorm 3 to 5 events.
3. After a team has completed the Story Map they can begin writing the script. They should first list the characters and describe the setting. The team can then use different approaches to write. One method is to have each person on the team become one of the characters. The team should brainstorm a first line and then write the rest of the play collaboratively. Each person will contribute lines that their character would say. Another method is to have each person write the script for one of the events or scenes. Because of the experience students have had writing scripts, this goes very well.
4. Have student teams read and act out their plays for the rest of the class using a Reader Theatre approach where students bring their scripts with them instead of memorizing lines.

Memorizing lines and performing the plan is stressful although if the teacher has time and energy it's a great activity and really brings students together.

# STORY MAP

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting:

Characters: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Problem:

Event 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Event 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Event 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Event 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Solution: